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Guidance

Stay at home: guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) infection

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Who this guidance is for

With the arrival of winter and an increase in the number of cases of coronavirus (COVID-19), it is more important than ever that we all take steps to reduce the spread of infection in the community to save lives and protect the NHS.

This guidance is for:

- people with symptoms that may be caused by COVID-19 including those who are waiting for a test
- people who have received a positive COVID-19 test result (whether or not they have symptoms)
- people who currently live in the same household as someone with COVID-19 symptoms or who has received a positive test result

In this guidance a household means:

- one person living alone
- a group of people (who may or may not be related) living at the same address and who share cooking facilities, bathrooms or toilets and/or living areas
- a support bubble (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-a-support-bubble-with-another-household)

Follow separate guidance if you do not currently live in the same household (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-contacts-of-people-with-possible-or-confirmed-coronavirus-covid-19-infection-who-do-not-live-with-the-person) as a person who has tested positive for COVID-19 but have had close contact with someone who has tested positive. If you have arrived in the UK from overseas you may also need to self-isolate (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-how-to-self-isolate-when-you-travel-to-the-uk/coronavirus-covid-19-how-to-self-isolate-when-you-travel-to-the-uk).

Symptoms

The most important symptoms of COVID-19 are recent onset of any of the following:

- a new continuous cough
- a high temperature
- a loss of, or change in, your normal sense of taste or smell (anosmia)

For most people, COVID-19 will be a mild illness. However, if you have any of the symptoms above, stay at home and arrange to have a test (https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-and-tracing/get-a-test-to-check-if-you-have-coronavirus/).

Main messages

If you have COVID-19 symptoms or have received a positive test result

Stay at home and begin to self-isolate for 10 days from when your symptoms start. Arrange to have a test (https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-and-tracing/get-a-test-to-check-if-you-have-coronavirus/) for COVID-19 if you have not already had one. The result of the test will determine how long you must stay at home and self-isolate.

Stay at home while you are waiting for a home test kit or a test site appointment.

A positive test result means you must complete a 10-day isolation period.

If your test is negative, you can stop self-isolating as long as you are well.

If you do not have symptoms but have tested positive for COVID-19, stay at home and self-isolate for 10 days from the day the test was taken. If you develop symptoms after your test, restart your 10-day isolation period from the day the symptoms start.

Stay as far away from other members of your household as possible, especially if they are clinically extremely vulnerable (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19). Avoid using shared spaces such as kitchens and other living areas while others are present and take your meals back to your room to eat.

You could be fined if you do not stay at home and self-isolate following a positive test result for COVID-19 and you are notified by NHS Test and Trace that you need to self-isolate.

If you live in the same household as someone with COVID-19

Stay at home for 14 days. The 14-day period starts from the day the first person in your house developed symptoms or, if they do not have symptoms, from the day their test was taken.

If you do not have symptoms of COVID-19 yourself you do not need a test. Only arrange a test if you develop COVID-19 symptoms.

If you develop symptoms and your test result is positive, follow the same advice for people with COVID-19 to stay at home and self-isolate for 10 days from when your symptoms started, regardless of where you are in your 14-day period.

You could be fined if you are identified as a contact of someone with COVID-19 and you are notified by NHS Test and Trace that you need to self-isolate and do not to stay at home and self-isolate.

Reduce the spread of COVID-19 in your household

Everyone in your household should take the following steps to reduce the risk of catching COVID-19 or passing it on to others.

Wash your hands regularly for at least 20 seconds with soap and water or use hand sanitiser. Cover your mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when you cough or sneeze, bin it promptly and wash your hands. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into the crook of your elbow. Avoid touching your face.

If you have symptoms of COVID-19 or a positive test result, use a face covering when spending time in shared areas inside your home.

Look after your health and wellbeing

Remember to take care of your mind as well as your body and get support if you need it. Think about the things you can do during your time at home and stay in touch with family and friends over the phone, or by text, email or social media.

Exercise in your home, garden or private outdoor space if you feel well enough.

There are many sources of support and information, including guidance on the mental health and wellbeing aspects of COVID-19 (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-public-on-mental-health-and-wellbeing/guidance-for-the-public-on-the-mental-health-and-wellbeing-aspects-of-coronavirus-covid-19) and guidance on supporting children and young people (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-supporting-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-and-wellbeing).

If your condition gets worse or in a medical emergency

Health and care services remain open to help people with all health conditions, including COVID-19. Most people with COVID-19 will experience a mild illness which can be managed at home. More information about managing the symptoms at home (https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/self-isolation-and-treatment/how-to-treat-symptoms-at-home/) is available.

If you or anyone in your household feel like you cannot cope with the symptoms at home, or your condition gets worse, use the NHS 111 online (https://111.nhs.uk/covid-19) COVID-19 service. If you do not have internet access, call NHS 111.

For a medical emergency dial 999.

How COVID-19 is spread

COVID-19 spreads from person to person through small droplets, aerosols and through direct contact. Surfaces and belongings can also be contaminated with COVID-19 when people with the infection cough or sneeze or touch them. The risk of spread is greatest when people are close to each other, especially in poorly ventilated indoor spaces and when people spend a lot of time together in the same room.

Social distancing, washing your hands and good respiratory hygiene (using and disposing of tissues), cleaning surfaces and keeping indoor spaces well ventilated are the most important ways to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

People who have COVID-19 can infect others up to 2 days before symptoms start, and for up to 10 days after. They can pass the infection to others, even if they have mild symptoms or no symptoms at all, which is why they must stay at home.

People who live in the same household as someone with COVID-19 are at higher risk of developing COVID-19 in the next 14 days. They could spread the disease to others even when feeling well, which is why they must stay at home.

If you have COVID-19 symptoms or have received a positive test result

It is very important that people with COVID-19 symptoms or a positive test result stay at home and avoid contact with other household members as much as possible.

It may be difficult for some people to separate themselves from others in their household. Not all these measures will be possible if you are living with children or have caring responsibilities, but follow this guidance to the best of your ability in these circumstances.

Stay at home and arrange a COVID-19 test

If you have symptoms of COVID-19 stay at home and start to self-isolate for 10 days from when your symptoms start and arrange to have a COVID-19 test (https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-and-tracing/get-a-test-to-check-if-you-have-coronavirus/).

Stay at home while you are waiting for a home test kit or a test site appointment. You may need to leave your house to visit a COVID-19 test site or in certain circumstances (https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/1045/made), but do not leave your home for any other reason, and only exercise within your home, garden or private outdoor space.

Avoid contact with other household members as much as possible. This helps prevent the spread of the virus to family, friends and the wider community, particularly those who are clinically extremely vulnerable (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19).

If you do not have symptoms but have tested positive for COVID-19, stay at home for 10 days from the day the test was taken. This is because you can still pass the infection to others. If you do develop symptoms after your test, restart the 10-day period from the day your symptoms develop.

Follow the general advice to reduce the spread of the infection within your household.

If you have a positive COVID-19 test result

If your test result is positive, you must continue to self-isolate for 10 days from when your symptoms started, or when your test was taken. Anyone who is notified that they have tested positive for COVID-19 and advised to self-isolate has a legal duty to self-isolate. Failure to comply may result in a fine, starting from £1,000.

You will receive a request by text, email or phone to log into the NHS Test and Trace (https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-and-tracing/get-a-test-to-check-if-you-have-coronavirus/) service website and provide information about recent close contacts. This information will be used to give public health advice to your contacts, but they will not be told your identity.

It is very important that you provide this information, as it will play a vital role in helping to protect your family, friends and the wider community. It is now an offence to knowingly provide false information about your close contacts to NHS Test and Trace and failure to comply with these requirements may result in a fine.

If you have a negative COVID-19 test result

A negative result means the test did not find COVID-19 at the time the test was taken.

- you are well
- no-one else in your household has symptoms
- if anyone else in your household has symptoms they have also received a negative test result
- you have not been advised to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace (https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-and-tracing/get-a-test-to-check-if-you-have-coronavirus/)
- you have not arrived into the UK from a non-exempt country (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-how-to-self-isolate-when-you-travel-to-the-uk/coronavirus-covid-19-how-to-self-isolate-when-you-travel-to-the-uk) within the last 14 days

Anyone in your household who is isolating because of your symptoms can also stop isolating.

If your test result is negative but you still have symptoms, you may have another virus such as a cold or flu. You should stay at home until you feel well. Seek medical attention if you are concerned about your symptoms.

How to limit close contact with others in the household

Spend as little time as possible in shared spaces such as kitchens, bathrooms and sitting areas. Avoid using shared spaces such as kitchens and other living areas while others are present and take your meals back to your room to eat.

Use a separate bathroom from the rest of the household where possible. If a separate bathroom is not available, try and use the facilities last, before cleaning the bathroom using your usual cleaning products. The bathroom should be cleaned regularly.

You should use separate towels from other household members, both for drying yourself after bathing or showering and for drying your hands. Keep your room well-ventilated by opening a window to the outside.

You can find more advice on reducing the risks from COVID-19 in your home at GermDefence (https://www.germdefence.org/).

Returning to your normal routine

You can return to your normal routine and stop self-isolating after 10 days if your symptoms have gone or if you continue to have just a cough or anosmia. This is because a cough or anosmia can last for several weeks once the infection has gone.

If you still have a high temperature after 10 days, stay at home and seek medical advice.

If you live with someone with COVID-19 symptoms or a positive test result

Stay at home

Stay at home for 14 days. This is because you may have been exposed to the virus and could pass it on to others, even if you don't have symptoms. Do not leave your home unless in certain circumstances (https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/1045/made), and only exercise within your home, garden or private outdoor space.

Your 14-day isolation period starts from the day when the first person in your household developed symptoms. If you are isolating because someone in your house has had a positive test result but does not have symptoms, your 14-day period starts from the day their test was taken.

If for any reason you have a negative test result during your 14-day isolation period, this does not mean you can stop isolating. Even if you don't have symptoms, you could still pass the infection on to others. Stay at home for the full 14 days to avoid putting others at risk.

If you are identified as a contact and told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace, you have a legal duty to self-isolate. Failure to comply may result in a fine, starting from £1,000. Parents or guardians are legally responsible for ensuring that anyone under 18 self-isolates if they test positive for COVID-19 and are contacted by NHS Test and Trace and told to self-isolate.

Those who are clinically extremely vulnerable (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19) should be supported to minimise their contact with other people in the household during this period, regardless of whether others have symptoms or not.

If you go on to develop COVID-19 symptoms

If you develop symptoms of COVID-19 during the 14-day isolation period, arrange to have a COVID-19 test (https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-and-tracing/get-a-test-to-check-if-you-have-coronavirus/).

If your test result is positive, follow the advice for people with COVID-19. Stay at home for 10 days from the day that your symptoms started, regardless of where you are in your 14-day period.

If your test result is negative, you are still at risk of developing COVID-19 and should continue to stay at home for the full 14-day period. You could spread the infection to others during this time even if you do not have any symptoms.

Returning to your normal routine

If you remain well, you can return to your normal routine at the end of the 14-day period. You do not need to isolate for longer than 14 days, even if other household members develop symptoms during this period. However, the person with new symptoms should now self-isolate for 10 days. People in the household who remain well after 14 days are unlikely to be infectious.

Visitors to the household

Do not invite or allow social visitors to enter your home, including friends and family. If you want to speak to someone who is not a member of your household, use the phone, email or social media.

If you or a family member receive essential care in your home, carers should continue to visit and follow the provision of home care guidance (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-providing-home-care/coronavirus-covid-19-provision-of-home-care) to reduce the risk of infection.

All non-essential in-house services and repairs should be postponed until the self-isolation period is completed.

If you have tested positive for COVID-19, you will probably have developed some immunity to the disease. However, it cannot be guaranteed that everyone will develop immunity, or how long it will last. It is possible for tests to detect residual virus for some time after COVID-19 infection. Anyone who has previously received a positive test result for COVID-19 should only be re-tested within a 90-day period if they develop any new symptoms of COVID-19.

When you stop self-isolating, it's important to continue to wash your hands regularly, wear face coverings in enclosed public places, and maintain distance from people outside your household.

If someone else in your household becomes unwell

If anyone in your household develops COVID-19 symptoms after their isolation period has ended, they should arrange to have a test (https://www.nhs.uk/ask-for-a-coronavirus-test) and everyone in the household should follow the steps in this guidance again, even if they have had a positive COVID-19 test in the past.

If you develop COVID-19 symptoms again

If you develop COVID-19 symptoms at any point after ending your first period of isolation you and your household should follow the steps in this guidance again.

If you develop COVID-19 symptoms and had a positive test more than 14 days ago, you should arrange to have a new COVID-19 test (https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-and-tracing/get-a-test-to-check-if-you-have-coronavirus/). Stay at home while waiting for the test results.

If you had a positive COVID-19 test in the last 14 days, you do not need to have another test. You will still need to self-isolate for another 10 days after your symptoms start.

Reducing the spread of COVID-19 in your household

Everyone should take the following steps to reduce the spread of infection within their household.

Wash your hands

This is one of the most effective ways to reduce the risk of catching COVID-19 or passing it on to others. Wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds or using hand sanitiser, particularly after coughing, sneezing and blowing your nose and before you eat or handle food. Clean your hands frequently and avoid touching your face.

Cover coughs and sneezes

Cover your mouth and nose with disposable tissues when you cough or sneeze. If you do not have a tissue, cough or sneeze into the crook of your elbow, not into your hand.

Dispose of tissues into a rubbish bag and immediately wash your hands. If you have a carer, they should use disposable tissues to wipe away any mucus or phlegm after you have sneezed or coughed and then wash or sanitise their hands.

Cleaning your home to reduce spread of infection

Regularly clean frequently touched surfaces, such as door handles and remote controls, and shared areas such as kitchens and bathrooms. This is particularly important if you have a clinically extremely vulnerable (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/covid-19-guidance-for-young-people-on-shielding-and-protecting-people-most-likely-to-become-unwell-if-they-catch-coronavirus) person in the house.

Use standard household cleaning products like detergents and bleach to clean your home as these are very effective at getting rid of the virus on surfaces. Clean shared bathrooms each time they are used, especially the surfaces you have touched, using your usual bathroom cleaning products.

Cleaning cloths and personal waste such as used tissues and disposable face coverings should be stored in disposable rubbish bags. These bags should be placed into another bag, tied securely and put aside for at least 72 hours before being put in your usual external household waste bin. Other household waste can be disposed of as normal.

Use a dishwasher to clean and dry your crockery and cutlery. If this is not possible, wash them by hand using washing up liquid and warm water and dry thoroughly using a separate tea towel.

Laundry

To minimise the possibility of dispersing virus through the air, do not shake dirty laundry. Wash items in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. All dirty laundry can be washed in the same load. If you do not have a washing machine, wait a further 72 hours after your self-isolation has ended when you can then take the laundry to a public launderette.

Do not share towels, including hand towels and tea towels.

Ventilate indoor areas

Keep indoor areas well-ventilated, especially shared living areas. If you have symptoms, stay in a well-ventilated room with a window to the outside that can be opened if this is possible. Keep the door closed.

Use a face covering

If you have symptoms of COVID-19 or a positive test result, use a face covering when spending time in shared areas inside your home if possible. Used correctly, a face covering may help to protect others by reducing the transmission of COVID-19 but they do not replace the need to limit your contact with other household members.

Wearing a face covering may not be possible in every situation or for some people. Face coverings should not be worn by children under the age of 11, or people who cannot put on, wear or remove one because of a physical or mental illness or impairment, or disability. You can find out more about how to use and make your own face coverings (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-wear-and-make-a-cloth-face-covering/how-to-wear-and-make-a-cloth-face-covering).

COVID-19 in the UK is spread between humans. There is limited evidence that some animals, including pets, can become infected with SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) following close contact with infected humans. At this time, there is no evidence that pets can transmit the disease to humans.

Pet owners who have COVID-19 or who are self-isolating with symptoms should restrict contact with pets and wash their hands thoroughly before and after interacting with their pet.

Looking after your health and wellbeing

Looking after your mental and physical wellbeing while staying at home

Staying at home for a prolonged period can be difficult, frustrating and lonely for some people and that you or other household members may feel low. It can be particularly challenging if you do not have much space or access to a garden.

Remember to take care of your mind as well as your body and get support if you need it. There are many sources of support and information, such as guidance on looking after your mental health and wellbeing (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-public-on-mental-health-and-wellbeing/guidance-for-the-public-on-the-mental-health-and-wellbeing-aspects-of-coronavirus-covid-19) and on supporting children and young people (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-supporting-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-and-wellbeing).

Many people find it helpful to remind themselves why what they are doing is so important. By staying at home, you are helping to protect your friends and family, other people in your community and the NHS.

Things that you can do to help make staying at home easier:

- keep in touch with friends and family over the phone or through social media
- remember that physical exercise can be good for your wellbeing. Look for online classes or courses that can help you take light exercise in your home
- plan ahead and think about what you will need to be able to stay at home for the full duration
- ask your employer, friends and family for help to access the things you will need while staying at home
- think about and plan how you can get food and other supplies, such as medication, that you will need during this period
- check if your neighbourhood or local community has a volunteer system that could help bring you supplies or provide other support
- ask friends or family to drop off anything you need or order supplies online or by phone, making sure these are left outside your home for you to collect
- think about things you can do during your time at home such as cooking, reading, online learning and watching films
- many people find it helpful to plan out the full 10 or 14 days. You may also find it helpful to plan in advance what you will do if, for example, someone in your household were to feel much worse

If you need medical advice

Health and care services remain open to help people with all health conditions, including COVID-19. Most people with COVID-19 will experience a mild illness which can be managed at home. Find out more about managing the symptoms of COVID-19 at home (https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/self-isolation-and-treatment/how-to-treat-symptoms-at-home/).

All routine medical and dental appointments should be cancelled while you are staying at home. If you are concerned or have been asked to attend in person during this time, discuss this with your medical contact first (for example, your GP or dentist, local hospital or outpatient service).

Seek prompt medical attention if your illness or the illness of someone in your household is worsening. If it is not an emergency, contact the NHS 111 online (https://111.nhs.uk/) COVID-19 service or NHS 111 for other health conditions. If you have no internet access, call NHS 111.

If it is a medical emergency and you need to call an ambulance, dial 999. Inform the call handler or operator that you or someone in your household has COVID-19 or symptoms if that is the case.

Financial or other practical support

Self-isolation is one of the most important things we can do to help stop the spread of the virus and protect our friends and family, our community and the NHS. If you have symptoms of COVID-19, have received a positive test result, or have been told you are a contact with someone who has, self-isolation is the only way to guarantee you won't pass COVID-19 to others. If you are told to isolate, you should do so straight away.

Ask your employer, friends and family for help to access the things you will need while staying at home. More information on accessing food and essential supplies (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-accessing-food-and-essential-supplies) is available.

Check if your neighbourhood or local community has a volunteer system that could help bring you supplies or provide other support. Ask friends or family to drop off anything you need or order supplies online or by phone, making sure these are left outside your home for you to collect.

If you are unable to work due to COVID-19, see guidance from the Department for Work and Pensions (https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus/worker-support) to find out about support available to you. You may be entitled to a one-off payment of £500 through the NHS Test and Trace Support Payment scheme if you are required to stay at home and self-isolate. You will be eligible if you live in England and meet all the following criteria:

- you have been asked to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace
- you are employed or self-employed
- you cannot work from home and will lose income as a result
- you are claiming at least one of the following benefits:
  - Universal Credit
  - Working Tax Credits
  - income-related Employment and Support Allowance
  - income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
  - Income Support
  - Pension Credit or Housing Benefit

Visit your local authority's website for more information.

If you have symptoms of COVID-19, have tested positive or are living in a household with someone who has COVID-19, you may be concerned about the infection spreading to your baby if you are breastfeeding.

The benefits of breastfeeding outweigh any potential risks of transmission of the virus through breast milk or by being in close contact, however, this will be an individual decision. Talk to your midwife, health visitor or GP by telephone.

There is currently no evidence to suggest that the COVID-19 virus can be transmitted through breast milk. However, COVID-19 infection can be passed on to a baby in the same way as it can to anyone in close contact with you. The current evidence is that children with COVID-19 get much less severe symptoms than adults.

If you or a family member are feeding with formula or expressed milk, sterilise the equipment carefully before each use. You should not share bottles or a breast pump with someone else.

You can find more information from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/guidelines-research-services/guidelines/coronavirus-pregnancy/covid-19-virus-infection-and-pregnancy/).

People with learning disabilities, autism or serious mental illnesses

Not all these measures will be possible if you, or those you live with, have conditions such as learning disabilities, autism or serious mental illnesses. Follow this guidance to the best of your ability, whilst keeping yourself and those close to you safe and well, ideally in line with any existing care plans.

Legal requirements for self-isolation

You could be fined if you do not stay at home and self-isolate following a positive test result for COVID-19, or if you are a contact of someone who has tested positive, and you are notified by NHS Test and Trace that you need to self-isolate.

It is also an offence to knowingly provide false information about your close contacts to NHS Test and Trace.

Failure to comply with these requirements may result in a fine of up to £10,000. These regulations only apply in England (https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/1045/made).

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